



# FIRST THINGS FIRST

*The right system for bright futures*

**To: Members of the Regional Partnership Councils**

**From: Michelle Katona, Assistant Director Regional Partnership Councils** *MK*

**CC: Regional Coordinators and Managers**

**RE: Upcoming meetings, policies and information for your review**

**Date: July 7, 2009**

I hope everyone's summer is off to a good start. April 2009 marked the one year anniversary for the First Things First Regional Partnership Councils. Extraordinary work has been accomplished for children by over 300 volunteers during this time and includes the following: Completion of regional needs and assets reports, completion of regional funding plans that provide a strategic direction for how \$130 million in tobacco tax money should be allocated throughout the regions, establishing and strengthening relationships with the Arizona Tribes, addressing the needs of children and families through the FTF Early Childhood Emergency Response Plan, hosting award presentations throughout Arizona, serving as champions for young children to protect First Things First funding and critical services and programs for children and families, and releasing various requests for grant applications in response to the funding plans. This is not a comprehensive list but rather highlights the major activities completed and for which every Regional Council member should be applauded for their tireless dedication and efforts to ensure the young children of Arizona are given every opportunity to reach their full potential.

Below is information on various topics for your review. Should you have any questions or need additional information please contact me or your Regional Coordinator.

**Regional Chairs/Vice Chairs Meeting:** A meeting with the Regional Chairs and Vice Chairs has been scheduled for September 10, 2009 from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Board Chair Steve Lynn and Vice Chair Rhian Evans Allvin will be attending the meeting. The location has not been determined but will be held in the greater Phoenix area. Information about the location and the agenda will be sent out in advance of the meeting. Please mark your calendars.

I also want to thank the members who served as Chair and Vice Chair for their Regional Councils in 2009 and congratulate the incoming Chairs and Vice Chairs for SFY2010. Your leadership is greatly appreciated.

Steven Lynn  
Chair

Rhian Evans Allvin  
Vice Chair

Nadine Mathis Basha  
Member

Dr. Arturo Gonzalez  
Member

Vacant  
Member

Hon. Cecil Patterson  
Member

Dr. Pamela Powell  
Member

Vivian Saunders  
Member

Dr. Eugene Thompson  
Member

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS  
Will Humble  
Interim Director, ADHS

Neil Young  
Director, ADES

Amy Corriveau  
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**FTF Regional Council Member Attendance Policy:** A draft attendance policy was reviewed by the Board at the June meeting and will be considered for approval at the August meeting. The draft policy is enclosed for your review with this memorandum.

A Regional Partnership Council's ability to operate effectively is dependent upon the full participation of all of its members. Each Regional Council member is appointed as a representative of a specific sector (i.e. education, child care, health, etc) with expertise about a specific component of the early childhood system. Each member's individual contribution serves to inform the entire Regional Partnership Council and ensures that decisions of the Regional Council respect the diverse perspectives of these important community sectors. Therefore, when a Regional Council member misses a meeting the quality of input and decision making is diminished. Additionally, the absent member misses important information and updates about the work of the Regional Partnership Council, therefore, making it more difficult for them to contribute effectively in the future.

The FTF statute A.R.S. §8-1162(D) reads as follows:

*Members of the Regional Partnership Council who miss more than three meetings without excuse or resign their membership shall be replaced by the Board after a public application process and with the input of the Regional Partnership Council.*

The statute lacks specificity as there is no definition for what constitutes an absence "without excuse" or of the process for removing a Regional Council member who has problem attendance. The proposed attendance policy includes definitions of excused and unexcused absences, the opportunity for personal intervention with Regional Council members exhibiting problem attendance that may result in either improved attendance or a voluntary resignation, and the process for the Board to remove a Regional Council member.

This attendance policy may be reviewed and discussed during a Regional Council meeting or members may prefer to review individually. Please provide feedback on this policy to your Regional Coordinator by August 1<sup>st</sup>.

**Regional Boundaries:** The FTF statute addresses the designation of regional boundaries and pursuant to ARS 8-1164, the Board may re-designate regional boundaries no later than January 15<sup>th</sup> of any even-numbered year. To help Regional Councils conduct and submit timely regional FY 2011 funding plans by November 10, 2009, however, the Board established the date of September 1, 2009 to have revisited and re-designated regional boundaries for FY 2011.

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Regional boundaries were established in 2007 based on the following criteria set by the Board:

- Where families access services;
- Existing boundaries or service areas of organizations providing early childhood services;
- The ability to maximize collaboration with service systems, regions and local governments;
- The flexibility of tribal nations to opt in or out of the Region(s) in their geographic area; and,
- Availability of demographic and other information.

We have finalized arrangements with a consultant, Linda Cannon from Linda Cannon & Associates, Inc., to conduct a review of the regional boundaries that were established two years ago. A brief survey will be sent around July 11<sup>th</sup> to all Regional Council members to determine their perspectives on how well the current boundaries are serving the objectives of FTF and to determine what is working well about the boundaries and what issues, if any, have been identified. In addition, information will be gathered from the Board, FTF staff, and key stakeholders.

Where possible changes are identified, discussion will be held with Council members from all geographic areas that may be impacted by a change to further explore the option and impact.

A draft report will be provided to agency leadership by mid-August and final recommendations will be provided to the Board at their August meeting. A copy of the recommendations will be sent to regional council members and they will have the opportunity to send comments to the Board members prior to the Board meeting or make comment during the Call to the Public Portion of the meeting.

Regional Councils will be informed of any changes to the regional boundaries that are established by the Board.

**Regional Council Member Survey:** We are preparing a survey to send out to Regional Council members the end of July so we can hear from you about your experience as a Regional Council member and your perspective on how First Things First and the Regional Councils are working. Your feedback is important and will be used to continue to identify areas where we need to improve and make necessary changes to ensure we are having a positive impact and achieving our mission. Thank you in advance for taking the time to complete this survey. Thank you again for your commitment and the work you do on behalf of children every day. I can be reached at 602.771.5018 or via email at [mkatona@azftf.gov](mailto:mkatona@azftf.gov) should you need additional information or have any questions.

## **Proposal for Board Policy on Regional Council Attendance**

### **BACKGROUND:**

There are 31 Regional Partnership Councils, each with eleven volunteer members, operating as part of the First Things First organization. A Regional Partnership Council's ability to operate effectively is dependent upon the full participation of all of its members. Each Regional Council member is appointed as a representative of a specific sector (i.e. education, child care, health, etc) with expertise about a specific component of the early childhood system. Each member's individual contribution serves to inform the entire Regional Partnership Council and ensures that decisions of the Regional Council respect the diverse perspectives of these important community sectors. Therefore, when a Regional Council member misses a meeting the quality of input and decision making is diminished. Additionally, the absent member misses important information and updates about the work of the Regional Partnership Council, therefore, making it more difficult for them to contribute effectively in the future.

A.R.S. §8-1162(D), the state law governing First Things First, recognizes the importance of consistent attendance by Regional Council members with the following statement:

*Members of the Regional Partnership Council who miss more than three meetings without excuse or resign their membership shall be replaced by the Board after a public application process and with the input of the Regional Partnership Council.*

### **CHALLENGES:**

A number of Regional Partnership Councils have experienced problems as a result of poor attendance by Regional Council members. Often this leads to meetings being cancelled due to lack of quorum.

The statute addressing Regional Council member attendance lacks specificity. There is no definition for what constitutes an absence "without excuse" or of the process for removing a Regional Council member who has problem attendance.

Four Regional Coordinators provided copies of Attendance Policies that have been adopted by their Regional Council as part of their governance policies. The majority of Regional Partnership Councils are operating without an Attendance Policy. There is no consistency in how Regional Partnership Councils are handling attendance concerns.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

In order to have some level of consistency definitions for excused absences and acceptable attendance should be adopted. The goal should be that personal intervention with Regional Council members exhibiting problem attendance will result in either improved attendance or a voluntary resignation. If attendance does not improve and a member fails to resign voluntarily the Board should be requested by the Council to take appropriate action.

## **Regional Council Member Attendance**

Attendance Expectations: Regional Council members are expected to attend all Regional Council meetings. However, it is understood, that there will be times when Regional Council members will need to miss a meeting. The Region Coordinator will maintain an attendance roster that documents each Regional Council member's attendance at scheduled meetings.

Excused Absence: An excused absence occurs when a Regional Council member is unable to attend a meeting due to emergency, illness, injury, or previously scheduled travel or work or family obligation, which prevents participation at a meeting either in person or by phone.

Notification of a previously planned obligation should be provided to the Regional Coordinator at least 2 weeks in advance of the scheduled meeting. A Regional Council member who misses a meeting other than for a previously planned obligation must still contact the Regional Coordinator as soon as possible with the reason for missing a meeting. An emergency is a situation that cannot reasonably be planned for in advance, e.g. car trouble, weather conditions, family illness.

Unexcused Absence: An unexcused absence occurs when a Regional Council member is absent from a scheduled meeting without providing sufficient notice or without providing a bona-fide explanation of the reasons for the member's absence, consistent with excused absence definition above.

Determination of Excused Absence: The Regional Coordinator will determine whether an absence qualifies as an excused or unexcused absence. If there is a question about whether an absence meets the definition of an excused absence, the Regional Coordinator may consult with the Regional Council Chair or their Region's Manager for a determination.

Problem Attendance: An attendance problem will be defined as:

- a. 2 consecutive unexcused absences
- b. 3 consecutive absences, excused or unexcused
- c. more than 3 unexcused absences in a 12-month period
- d. more than 5 excused and unexcused absences in a 12 month period

Addressing an Attendance Problem: Upon identification of an attendance problem under "a" or "b" above, the Regional Council Chair or Regional Coordinator will call the Regional Partnership Council member to discuss their attendance record and remind him/her of the attendance expectations.

If a member reaches a level of non-attendance as identified in "c" above, the Regional Council Chair or Coordinator will ask the member to resign his/her position on the Regional Partnership Council. If, upon request, the member does not resign, the matter shall be forwarded to the Board for appropriate action.

If a member reaches a level of non-attendance under "d" above, of which no more than 3 are unexcused, the Regional Council Chair or Regional Coordinator may ask the member to resign his/her position in order to ensure the Council has sufficient participation to timely and appropriately complete its work. If the member refuses to resign, the matter shall be taken to the full Regional Partnership Council, discussed and a decision made to allow the member to continue to participate or to refer the member to the Board for possible removal from the Regional Council.